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The United States: An Experiment in Democracy. By CARL BECKER. (New York: Harper and Brothers. 1920. Pp. 333.)

Professor Becker undertakes in this volume to describe the origin and development of the principles of democracy in the United States giving special emphasis to such principles as are regarded peculiar to American politics and economics. The first few chapters trace the beginnings of democracy in America, the series of chapters following is devoted to the relation of these principles of democracy to certain typical American conditions and problems such as free land, slavery, immigration, education, and equality. A large part of the volume is comprised of a rehearsal of well known historical facts interspersed by occasional suggestive observations. For example, parts of the second and third chapters are given to an account of the aristocratic methods and practices which largely controlled the colonial governments. In this respect a story is repeated which forms a part of most recent works on general American history or American government. An account of similarly well-known historical facts constitutes a large portion of the volume. Somewhat more emphasis is accorded to economic and social factors in the formulation of the typical American principles of democracy than is customary in general treatises.

The author has attempted in his discussion of certain topics to combine history and government. This attempt has resulted in a superficial treatment which cannot be of much use either from the standpoint of history or of government. In the effort to make this combination and to relate the discussion to modern political problems, the author often passes rather abruptly from colonial times and the political ideas then prevalent to the conditions which prevail in the United States at the present time. Warning is given in the concluding chapter against the dangers of absolutism whether of the few or of the many, on the theory that democracy is unsafe when based on the dominance of any class or economic group. As in a number of similar instances the facts of history are brought in review to help form a judgment on a modern political problem.

An occasional use of personal incidents and a free and easy style render the chapters of the volume readable. Since the work appears to have been prepared for the general reader and not for the specialist, a semi-popular form of presentation is followed. The underlying principles

of American democracy, so far as that term can be accurately described, are well stated in language that any citizen who can read clear English can understand.

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Local Government in the United States. By HERMAN G. JAMES, Professor of Government in the University of Texas. (New York: D. Appleton and Company. 1921. Pp. xv, 482.)

During the last decade numerous books have been written on the subject of city government. With the exception, however, of Professor John A. Fairlie's treatise on *Local Government in Counties, Towns and Villages*, originally published in 1906, there has been no recent comprehensive work on rural local government in this country. Professor James' book which emphasizes the county and its subdivisions meets, therefore, a real need among those interested in local institutions. The book should also attract attention because of its attempt to cover in a single volume all the units of local government, rural as well as urban.

Professor James commences his work with a sketch of the history and present status of local government in England and France, together with a brief account of the system of central control in these countries. In order to obtain the necessary background for our own system of local government the author next devoted a chapter to the origin and development of local institutions in the United States. The remainder of the book deals with the existing structure, functions, problems and recent tendencies of counties, townships, towns, villages, cities and other units of local government in this country.

The county is considered in two chapters which give a clear and full description of its organization and of what it actually does. In this part of the book county financial administration is condemned from nearly every point of view, and the belief is expressed that the remedy for this condition must be found in a wider application of state administrative control over such matters as accounting, indebtedness and the assessment of property for taxation. Professor James also brings out the general inefficiency of the average American county in the performance of such important functions as judicial administration, which has fallen into disrepute because of the popular election of county judges and prosecuting attorneys, the administration of penal institutions, which is regarded as the most uniformly unsatisfactory phase of county